

TRUMBULL COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Dennis Watkins, Prosecutor

Repeat Violent Offenders newsletter

UPDATE: April 23, 2026

Hill's bid for relief struck down by Supreme Court of Ohio



The Supreme Court of Ohio, in a 7-0 decision, today struck a blow to convicted murderer Danny Lee Hill's latest bid to escape execution by reversing a decision by the 11th District Court of Appeals to allow a civil rule to be used in challenging the denial of Hill's latest petition for postconviction relief based on intellectual disability.

Chief Justice C.J. Kennedy, in authoring the majority opinion, noted that a capital defendant may not collaterally challenge a prior judgment by filing a motion under civil rules. "Ohio criminal law provides the exclusive mechanism by which a person may bring a collateral challenge to the validity of a conviction or sentence in a criminal case," the summary of the ruling stated.

Chief Justice Kennedy was joined by Ohio Supreme Court Justices Fischer, DeWine, Hawkins, Shanahan, Brunner and Deters in reversing the decision.

Justices Brunner and Deters also wrote concurring opinions. ([See attached document](#))

Ohio's high court also remanded the matter back to the 11th District court for consideration of Hill's remaining assignment of error in his appeal of Visiting Judge Patricia Cosgrove's 2023 decision denying Hill's petition for relief because it was "untimely and successive."

In her decision, Judge Cosgrove, in noting the delays in the case caused by the excessive appeals made by Hill, found that the trial evidence overwhelmingly supported Hill's conviction for aggravated murder with the death penalty specification. Cosgrove also noted that the issue of intellectual disability "has been examined and re-examined... in several postconviction petitions and motions for a new trial. The evidence of Hill's behavior before the age of 18 is not new evidence," Cosgrove wrote in her 2023 decision, which the 11th District Court must now consider. ([See attached document](#))

Trumbull County Prosecutor Dennis Watkins applauded this latest decision, also noting the "long line" of federal and state courts which have denied Hill's attempt to escape execution. Watkins further believes that Judge Cosgrove's decision, as was those of the prior Ohio judges, from the trial level through the

state courts and the federal system, that found Hill was fairly tried, convicted and sentenced to death for torturing and murdering 12-year-old Raymond Fife in 1985, will be upheld. Watkins also noted that while a few judges in the minority disagree, there has not been any court finding Hill, who had malingered on various IQ tests, is intellectually disabled.

Hill was convicted and sentenced to death in 1986 by a three-judge panel of aggravated arson, kidnapping, rape, felonious sexual penetration and aggravated murder with capital specifications arising out of the September 1985 torture and murder of 12-year-old Raymond Fife of Warren.

The Ohio Supreme Court first struck down Hill's original appeal of his conviction and death sentence back in 1992. Later in 2003, after Hill filed his original Atkins petition, Judge Thomas Curran presided over the longest Ohio Atkins hearing relating to Hill's alleged intellectual disability. After an expert for the state and another expert for the court had determined that Hill was not intellectually disabled, Judge Curran rejected his argument, and Ohio's high court in 2009 declined to accept Hill's appeal.

An attempt by Hill to mount an Atkins claim in the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court was struck down in 2022, by a 9-7 vote after an en banc hearing. And the U.S. Supreme Court followed by declining to review that 6th Circuit decision.

Those decisions led to Hill's attorneys filing a motion in the local court seeking a second bid for relief under Civil Rule 60(B), which Ohio's high court referred to in its ruling today.

In authoring another majority opinion, Justice Deters noted the excessive delays in justice in this case has caused "injustice to the victim's family."

"Serial re-litigation of final convictions undermines the finality that 'is essential to both the retributive and deterrent functions of criminal law,'" Justice Deter writes noting Raymond Fife's family and the citizens of Ohio have been deprived of finality for over 40 years.

"Today, this court takes a step toward preventing further delay in achieving finality in criminal matters by recognizing the inapplicability of Civil Rule 60(B)_ motions to judgments denying a criminal defendant's petition for postconviction relief," Justice Deters writes in ending the 16-page decision.

Watkins thanks his Assistant Prosecutor Charles L. Morrow, Ohio Attorney General Yost, Ohio Solicitor General Mathura J. Sridharan, Chief Deputy Solicitor General Michael J. Hendershot and Assistant Attorney General Stephen Maher for their hard work in this appeal to the Ohio Supreme Court.

For more information, contact Guy M. Vogrin, investigator/public information officer for the Trumbull County Prosecutor's Office at 330-675-2485.